

Global Sport in the Pacific: A Brief Overview

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Since Sāmoa's national rugby union team, Manu Samoa, stunned the rugby sporting world by its win over Wales during the 1991 Rugby World Cup, players from the Pacific have emerged as a power factor in the global game. At that point there was no way to anticipate a transnational rugby dynasty like the Tuilagi brothers,¹ or the movement of large numbers of Pacific players much farther afield beyond Fiji, Tonga, Sāmoa, and even Aotearoa/New Zealand. The players and fans could not have predicted that twenty years later, in the 2011 Rugby World Cup, 20 percent of the players would identify as Pacific Islander (Paul 2013). Today few international contests are played without Pacific representation. This is but one example of the massive rise not only of global sport in the Pacific but also of the Pacific in global sport.

For some, sport in the Pacific has become associated with waged labor, economic development, and physical fitness and health. It has also become a site for sociocultural expression and an arena for conflict mediation, while for others it is just recreational play. In Aotearoa, Māori and other Polynesian players have provided an essential element to the long-standing success of rugby, both in their performance on the pitch and in becoming the face of the national game. A similar case can be made for rugby in Australia: in 2011, players of Pacific Islander descent signed 36 percent of National Rugby League (NRL) playing contracts (Heptonstall 2011). In the United States, a new generation of Samoan gridiron football stand-outs has emerged, drawn from urban and island contexts, leading some US media outlets to estimate that players of Samoan descent are 56 times more likely to play in the National Football League (NFL) than players with any other racial/ethnic background (Pelley 2010).² In recent decades, sport has increasingly become an important path of mobility for Pacific

Islander men in particular. Yet this movement continues to take place within the fragile context of the spread of globalized media, transnational capital investment, and development initiatives throughout the region. Players from the Pacific (particularly in rugby, rugby league, soccer, and gridiron football) have become icons through their sporting prowess not only within Oceania, but in Japan and throughout Europe as well, as new markets have opened up through professional and semi-professional sport (see Besnier 2012; Horton 2012; Grainger 2011; Dewey 2008). Rapidly changing global processes have also drawn so-called peripheral regions of the Pacific into a global sports-based tourism economy to accommodate the demand for more “authentic” experiences, such as surfing opportunities in Papua New Guinea, Tahiti, Fiji, and Tonga.

While acknowledging the widespread nature of and varied attachment to sporting practices, the articles in this issue focus on how and why they have become closely linked to various economic, political, and social processes that shape possibilities for everyday life throughout the Pacific region and beyond. Today, Pacific peoples find themselves positioned within dynamics of contemporary local, state, regional, and global economies that in many cases compel engagement with sport beyond mere forms of recreation and play. This collection aims, therefore, to consider the complicated realities of and links between modern, masculinized, highly commercialized team sports that have long drawn attention to the region and how they are shaped by, and in turn shape, political economies, popular discourses, and opportunity structures throughout the wider Pacific.³ The past, present, and future legacies of sport in the Pacific enable us to rethink an array of global processes from new angles. For example, from a perspective of transnational change, the lives of Pacific athletes present unique case studies through which we can reflect on the ephemeral nature of diasporic citizenship and forms of representation. Placing sport at the center of analysis highlights important contemporary dynamics in the Pacific. These essays explore in new and innovative ways some of the possibilities and contradictions facing young Pacific Islanders, their families, and their communities. In this they also engage the important but underdeveloped body of critical scholarship on sport in the Pacific. Furthermore, we hope these contributions encourage a critical focus on the continuing dispersal of global sport and its portrayal as promoting social and economic “development” in the region.

The seven articles presented in this special issue emerged as part of sessions on “Contemporary Sporting Formations in Oceania” held during

the 2009, 2010, and 2013 annual meetings of the Association for Social Anthropology in Oceania (ASAO). In their examination of how regional and global issues, institutions, and formations are interconnected in sporting practices across Oceania, the essays draw on and push in new directions a larger body of scholarship that has worked to unsettle common conceptions of modernity and mobility reliant on dichotomous paradigms that peripheralize the Pacific in both spatial and temporal terms.⁴ Still, while the contributions to this issue engage with multilayered geopolitical and regional processes in framing their arguments, it is the localized reaction and inventive responses to the rapidly changing field of sporting mobility that are central to the various insights expressed here. Each of these articles presents new and emerging research; together they provide a set of insights into highly capitalized sport in the Pacific today.

SITUATING WORK ON SPORTS IN THE PACIFIC

While sport as organized physical activity has a long and storied legacy in the Pacific—from the traditions of surfing royalty in Hawai‘i to the generations of competitive dart throwing and royal bird hunting in Sāmoa and beyond—the rise of global commercial sport in the twentieth century offered a different set of pathways to status, prestige, and enrichment for people across the Pacific. As colonial and imperial ventures of the nineteenth century reconfigured routes of movement for Islanders, contemporary waves of migration tied to new paradigms of development and modernization, capitalist accumulation, and more recently neoliberalism have inexorably reshaped the currents and landscapes of Pacific mobility. In this context, sporting prowess has taken on new and heightened meanings: as a counterrepresentation to persistent stereotypes, as a proud representation of a nation, as an alternative pathway toward a promised future, and as a site of cultural resurgence. In the contemporary moment of growing inequality, state retrenchment, widespread commoditization, and narrowing routes of upward mobility, people throughout the region find hope, meaning, confidence, and spectacular expression in sport.

In the Pacific, as elsewhere around the world, highly capitalized sports have traveled colonial routes and have been adapted, appropriated, and transformed by local peoples.⁵ A well-known example is the adaptation of cricket by Trobriand Islanders and other peoples of the Pacific (Leach and Kildea 1976; see also Foster 2006). At the same time, sporting practice and institutions have been transformed by several decades of capitaliza-

tion and commoditization, such as the professionalization of rugby union beginning in 1995.⁶ The articles in this collection engage with these complex interconnections to capture how Pacific responses to dynamics and struggles that are today highlighted through sport reveal inventive capacities for reshaping social landscapes and making cultural life meaningful. They also capture tensions and contradictions: contemporary sporting formations in Oceania are pluralized spaces through which participants move in uneven yet distinctive contours, negotiating spaces shaped by dynamics of power over which they have limited control. While these sporting formations are indeed enmeshed with hegemonic ideologies and structures of power emanating from colonialism, they are not exclusively bound to an imperialist-centric past. Sport from a Pacific perspective may instead be viewed as a complex interplay of “hybrid hegemonies” (Jolly 2008, 3). In a Foucauldian sense, then, the power inherent in Pacific sport continues to operate in ways that produce the realities for the men and women who constitute its performativity.

On a global scale, sport has attracted a growing body of scholars interested in the wider links between various games, competitors, organizations, and events, both within and across different societies. Since the 1960s, critical scholarship on sport has evolved from a more macro-sociological stance that has privileged “(over)developed countries in general and the ‘civilization’ of the west in particular” (Maguire and Falcous 2011, 4). Recent scholarship has highlighted the need for more reflexive approaches to analyzing the ways in which sport is dispersed and takes on new meanings throughout the world (Bale and Cronin 2003; Besnier and Brownell 2012; Rowe and Gilmour 2010). Not only has this move sought to further unravel the asymmetries inherent in uncritical approaches to commodification and transnational processes through sport, but focus has also shifted toward more localized non-Western *contexts* and *experiences* (Darby 2000). This special issue illuminates the value of sport in the Pacific as serious play, in terms of the actual practices but also as a unique vantage point from which to understand contemporary transnational processes that are often obscured in the focus on “global” sport (Carter 2011). Despite the enduring legacy of the Pacific’s geographical location on the “periphery,” focusing on sport in the region allows us to return to complex and important questions of scale. As these contributions indicate, the impact of the Pacific Islands on globalized sport runs counter to the region’s perceived isolation in the Global South. The articles in this issue draw on a variety of disciplinary approaches, including anthropol-

ogy, international development, and sports management, but they sustain engagement with and focus on the athletes, their families, and various agents involved in the contexts in which research took place. They take up the challenge to counter commodity fetishism of global sport and instead reveal specifics of structure, movement, and motivation that shape negotiations of transnational sporting dynamics (Carter 2011).

SPORT IN OCEANIA: KEY THEMES

Over the course of the ASAO sessions during which these essays were developed, four key themes emerged: agency and mobility; development and discipline; indigenization, embodiment, and ethno-nationalism; and polyvalent imaginaries. These themes are not meant to be exclusive or definitive, but they do reflect a critical mass of work on sport in the Pacific as it stands today.

Agency and Mobility

Given the nature of highly commercialized global sports and the potential rewards attached to sporting success, the issues of economic aspirations and mobility are central to any consideration of participation. The articles examine these issues from a variety of perspectives, considering participant aspirations within a larger context of mobility and existing structural constraints, scale of movement and opportunity, and the gendered character of sporting routes. With increasing numbers of young Pacific Islanders finding career paths through various professional sports in and around the region, it is ever more important that, rather than remain at the level of macroeconomic demographic analysis, researchers puzzle out the meanings that individuals, families, and communities attach to these movements (see, eg, Maguire 1999). Moreover, these career paths (for players, coaches, and other personnel) often involve migration and thus call for a more detailed examination of the shifting nature of emergent diasporic and cosmopolitan identities within the realm of the global economic and political systems of which they are a part. In this task, these articles build on earlier histories of sport in the Pacific and key works on sport migration and globalization.⁷

In the first article, Fa‘anofo Lisaclaire (Lisa) Uperesa focuses on the experiences of selected individuals in order to open up broader questions about Samoan movement and mobility in and through American football. The article analyzes these structurally specific paths of migration and

the multiple motivations that fuel the deep attachment of many Samoan communities to the gridiron game. Illustrating a shift in visions of the future that has taken place over the second half of the twentieth century in American Sāmoa and linked transpacific communities, we see dreams of “fabled futures” in and through sport intensifying as the stakes for potential success escalate. In the next piece, David Lakisa, Daryl Adair, and Tracy Taylor draw on Lakisa’s primary research with Pasifika players in Australian rugby league, where he identified family, faith, and culture as key motivations for Pasifika participation. While kinship relations and responsibilities, religious practice, and the cultural values and beliefs of Pasifika players are little understood by league personnel and the wider Australian public, these factors are at the core of what motivates and drives the young men toward sport success. Both of these articles focus on how players are drawn into global arenas of rugby and gridiron football and negotiate complex paths of mobility.

Development and Discipline

Several articles critically examine common paradigms of sport and development currently being invoked in parts of the Pacific through narrow and often deterministic neoliberal or modernist development agendas adopted by some states and international sporting federations. In these contexts, sport development emerges less as a source of “empowerment” of small-island states and more as the coalescence of local, national, regional, and global participation in the dynamics of transnational sport. Focusing a critical eye on “sport for development,” Christina Kwauk examines how sport discourse is reframed and resituated in the local context in independent Sāmoa. In this “Samoan ‘assemblage’ of sport,” the sports industry and the pathways for mobility it provides become woven into a “development common sense” that positions sport as a viable alternative pathway to the long-standing and highly valued educational route (Kwauk, this issue, 314). Kwauk’s essay raises questions about why so many youth become “school leavers”; about the ability of local economies to absorb a growing population; and about the redefinition of success over the twentieth century, which resonates with Uperesa’s article on American Sāmoa.

Farther east, in Solomon Islands, more than a decade has passed since the end of the period of ethnic tensions, which had seen scores of people killed and displaced, together with the almost total political and economic breakdown of the island archipelago. In Tom Mountjoy’s essay, sport is shown as a powerful mechanism through which development praxis

can be assessed in Pacific states. He argues that opposing visions of sport development reflect different epistemologies relating not only to sport but also to the future of the nation itself. Both Mountjoy's and Kwauk's essays speak to wider discussions of development that seek to consider the relationship between the structures, relations, and discourses of power that are operating in societies where sport is seen to be a "way in" for donor agencies working in the region. Together with Domenica Gisella Calabrò and Julien Clément, these authors also raise questions about disciplinary processes interwoven into projects of sport development and professionalization.

Indigenization, Embodiment, and Ethno-nationalism

In the midst of new and long-standing migration and circulation in the Pacific, sport has also become an important site of connection within transnational communities, whose participants are often seen as embodying national and cultural identities unbounded by geography. Several of the articles address how global sporting practices are being indigenized, appropriated, and claimed by Pacific Islander participants. These include the linking of indigenous concepts (like mana and mamalu [honor, esteem]) to sport performance; sport as a site of community and national unification or division; the development of local techniques of the body; and, to a lesser extent, sport as a site for articulating contemporary indigenous Pacific masculinities.⁸

In his examination of rugby in independent Sāmoa, Julien Clément analyzes linkages between village rugby and a global sporting infrastructure and investigates how the indigenous sociopolitical frameworks of fa'amatai (interlinked hierarchy of chiefly titles) and fa'asāmoa (often translated as the Samoan way or Samoan culture) shape the indigenization of commercialized rugby in Sāmoa. He argues that techniques of the body that emerge in village rugby are naturalized as "flair" in the regional/global rugby discourse in a way that ignores the important social production of both the playing style and contemporary Samoan masculinities associated with sporting prowess and performance.

Focusing on Māori in Aotearoa rugby, Domenica Calabrò examines Māori participation in rugby as complex political and sociocultural engagements that respond not only to aspects of colonialism but also to contemporary definitions of Māori identity. Building on the work of Brendan Hokowhitu, Calabrò makes explicit the ways in which rugby continues to serve as a contested forum for the mechanisms of inclusion and

exclusion in New Zealand society, alongside the indigenized imagery used as a prominent branding mechanism for the sport's iconic All Blacks. This resonates with Clément's discussion of the incorporation of global rugby in Sāmoa, Mountjoy's analysis of soccer politics and national futures, and Kwauk's examination of reframing discourses of the fit and productive citizen in Sāmoa.

Polyvalent Imaginaries

Related to the circulating imaginaries noted above, the issue of how particular kinds of representations of sport and Pacific athletes are being created, circulated, contested, appropriated, or transformed emerges in several articles. The authors examine changing narratives and imaginaries of male Pacific bodies, including ideas about "natural talent" (Kwauk, Uperesa, West); "warriors" (Calabrò); and "flair" (Clément)—racialized discourses of the natural circulating in sport that are part of much larger discourses of race, culture, and indigeneity. In tandem with shifting processes of commoditization and circulation, the ways in which global sporting institutions and consumers read expressions of indigeneity in the Pacific have long shaped the subtleties of engagement and participation in sport.

In her essay, Paige West argues that today the surf-sport-tourism industry in Papua New Guinea depends on and reproduces fantasies and imaginary formations about the relation between primitive and civilized peoples, places, and times held by tourists approaching the surfing "frontier." Positioning surf tourism—and the associated production, circulation, and consumption of surf sport commodities—as key to the global surf industry, West reveals the different layers of imagination about and attachment to the sport of surfing in Papua New Guinea as fundamentally shaped by processes of commodification and mediated images of indigeneity.

The articles in this collection, and those by West and Calabrò in particular, reveal how sporting practice is being claimed by participants and also read by consumers, developers, agents, coaches, and global organizations. They also consider how elements of fantasy and desire are woven into representations of particular sports (surfing, for example), which often intersect, and perpetuate notions of what may be perceived as natural, authentic, and indeed "indigenous."⁹ We view these analyses as enlarging past and emerging discussions of culture, identity, and the politics of indigeneity (eg, Diaz and Kauanui 2001; Henderson 2011; Gagné and Salaün 2012) by emphasizing the importance of ethnographically grounded contemporary research on sporting practice and mediated imagery.

This issue's cover image is a perfect example of both the indigenization of sport and the polyvalent nature of sporting images. The photograph, by Greg Semu, is from the 2010 *Body Pacifica* exhibition at Casula Powerhouse Arts Centre in Australia, which was curated by Leo Tanoi in collaboration with Nigel Vagana (NRL education and welfare officer and former professional rugby player). It features NRL player and former captain of the Rugby League Samoa team Roy Asotasi clad in an *ie faitaga* (tailored wraparound, worn by men), with a *to'oto'o* (staff) in his hand and a *fue* (fly whisk) draped over his shoulder. The photo caption tells us that the subject "wears his Samoan heritage like battle armor in the form of intricate tattoos and a family *ula* (garland)."

Initially, we had some reservations that the image selected for the cover might be viewed as an essentialized representation of Pacific cultural heritages and their connection to global sport. This narrow reading would contradict the themes and purpose of the special issue as well as of the exhibition and should be the beginning of a conversation rather than the end. According to Vagana, the collaboration between the rugby league and the arts center came at a time when Tanoi was organizing and looking for ways to publicize the exhibition and three-day community festival. Vagana was also pushing the league to acknowledge the critical mass of players of Pacific heritage by supporting "cultural engagement and empowerment" both on and off the pitch. The *Body Pacifica* exhibition was an opportunity to show the players as "cultural warriors first, athletes second" and was followed by other exhibitions as well as leadership training for players (pers comm, 3 April 2014). The art center-NRL effort to highlight the cultural identities of NRL players as valued and legitimate is one that (however imperfectly) aims to arm young Pacific men in new diasporic contexts with recognition of and pride in their cultural identities, which they themselves have said are important (Lakisa, this volume).

The photographic exhibition and its subsequent incarnation as a calendar (sold to raise funds for community arts work) deserve a more sustained conversation than can be taken up here. But it is worth marking from a critical perspective the unresolved tension in how images such as these help to "indigenize" global sporting institutions like the National Rugby League; how they represent and foster connections to home communities; how they provide a different kind of narrative about cultural heritage and a particular repertoire of masculinity that young men can adopt in a context where their identities as Pacific people are often invis-

ible, stereotyped, or generally devalued; and how they enter into a wider context of transnational circulation and consumption of visual representations of Pacific cultures and Pacific sportsmen. Ultimately we advocated for using this cover image because it illustrates precisely some of the key tensions that this issue examines.

CONTEMPORARY SPORTING FORMATIONS AND SPORTING FUTURES

The articles in this special issue articulate important intersections between global/transnational and local sports industries and economies, social and professional networks, processes of commodification, and (although not extensively covered) gender. Routes of mobility traced in all the essays are primarily open to men, and success is predicated on particular assumptions about and performance of indigenous Pacific masculinities in a contemporary context. In this dynamic, ideas about male Pacific bodies are suffused with conceptions of culture and, constitutively, race insofar as the capabilities are located in the “natural biology” of the body.

The tracking of Pacific Islander men into global sport, while celebrated by many for the multiple rewards attached to sporting success, nevertheless should give us pause given the long odds of success. In the United States, for example, approximately 1 percent of high school athletes play on scholarship in college, and the funnel narrows even more for professional sport (Eitzen 2009). Confusing the *possibility* with the *probability* of sporting success has sustained the “myth” of upward mobility through sport for marginalized populations for decades (Eitzen 2009). The widespread aspirations produced by growing numbers of Pacific Islanders in high-revenue sport, in the context of what appear to be ever-shrinking employment possibilities in the formal labor market, are at once rational and worrying. The potential for global stadia to replace the plantations of the past in the “blackbirding” of Pacific labor (Horton 2012; Field 2013) and mirror the sport exploitation and trafficking in other parts of the world (Darby 2000) is an alarming trend.

In the allure of top-level sport, the commodification process remains very much a double-edged sword. Young athletes seek to benefit through potential opportunities, yet the fact remains that every wrong step and every missed tackle places them at risk of rapid devaluation. Still, players’ (and coaches’) experience of sports migration should not be viewed entirely from an economic or ideological perspective. The articles here

highlight in a variety of ways the complex interplay between aspirations and “different regimes of valuation” (Besnier 2012, 505; Uperesa 2010, 117). Exemplified in Lakisa, Adair, and Taylor’s essay on the Pasifika diaspora in Australian rugby league, the economic contexts usually associated with the movement of Pasifika athletes into the game are in fact juxtaposed with diverse sociocultural factors that complicate our understandings of Pacific (sporting) diasporas.

These themes form the basis for this special issue, but given the space constraints, they do not exhaust the possibilities of research into other important aspects of contemporary Pacific sporting dynamics. We encourage future research to engage comparatively with a wide range of approaches to sport and a focus on transnational specificity in order both to extend the domain of “global sport” to include the Pacific and to work to liberate the region from a continuing legacy, both discursively and structurally, of peripheral dependence. For a discussion to effectively address the reality of transnational sport around the globe, the “South” must be included not only as a counter to the hegemony of the “North-West” voice but also in order to accurately portray the various ways sport is played out in non-Western contexts (Carter 2011). Following this, we see a creative use of existing methodological and theoretical tools merged with uniquely Pasifika articulations of sporting experience.

For transnational Pacific Islander communities especially, critically engaging the histories and presents of sporting practice (particularly those that are highly capitalized and commoditized) is imperative because they are shaping the future possibilities of current and coming generations. Uncovering those histories also gives voice to the lives and stories of the ancestors who came before, providing a different kind of link to the past. The sporting narratives continue to be formed and transformed, not as part of dichotomizing neocolonialist discourses and practices but as interdependences, to paraphrase Epeli Hau‘ofa (1993), which allow Pacific epistemologies and sporting prowess to reverberate in more nuanced ways into the future.

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WE ARE GRATEFUL TO THE *Association for Social Anthropology in Oceania* for providing a space to incubate these ideas and to previous panel participants who took part in early conversations. We also thank the three anonymous reviewers who provided detailed and insightful comments on the essays; any inaccuracies are ours.

Notes

1 The four oldest Tuilagi brothers (Freddie, Henry, Alesana, and Anitelia) have all represented Sāmoa at the Rugby World Cup, and the youngest (Manu) has chosen to represent England.

2 While this figure has become widely circulated and continues to shape public ideas about the presence of Samoans and Pacific Islanders in gridiron football, the authors here have not seen the calculations on which it is based and have serious concerns about its reliability.

3 The focus on highly capitalized global sports for this collection privileges male-dominated global team sports, with the exception of West's article on surfing. The increasing visibility of individual sports in the Pacific such as various martial arts, boxing, weightlifting, and so on is important but beyond the scope of the present collection.

4 See, eg, Besnier 2011; Diaz and Kauanui 2001; Hau'ofa 2008; Lee and Francis 2009.

5 For further studies on colonial routes of contemporary sports, their transformation in local contexts, and global sport in non-Western contexts, see Brownell 2008; Chandler and Nauright 1996; Dunning and Sheard 2005; Guttman 1994; Hokowhitu 2003a, 2009; MacAloon 2008; Mangan 1986, 1988, 1992.

6 Regarding the professionalization and commodification of sport, see Bourdieu 1998; Chandler and Nauright 1999; Nauright and Schimmel 2005; Staudohar and Mangan 1991.

7 For histories of sport in the Pacific, see Dewey 2008; Foster 2006; Franks 2000, 2002, 2009; Mallon 2012; Nendel 2009; Walker 2011. Key works on sport migration and globalization include Besnier 2012; Carter 2011; Grainger 2011; Horton 2012; Kanemasu and Molnar 2013; Maguire and Falcous 2011; Miller and others 2001.

8 See also Diaz 2002, 2011; Hokowhitu 2003a, 2004; Tengan and Markham 2009.

9 Regarding race and racialization in sport in the Pacific, see also Grainger 2009a, 2009b; Grainger, Falcous, and Newman 2012; Hallinan and Judd 2009; Hokowhitu 2003b.

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Abstract

In recent decades, sport has become an increasingly important path of mobility for Pacific Islander men, positioning them within interlinked local, state, regional, and global sporting economies. Players from the Pacific (particularly in rugby, rugby league, soccer, and gridiron football) have become icons through their sporting prowess, not only within Oceania but in Japan, the United States, and throughout Europe as well, as new markets have opened up through professional and semi-professional sport. Yet this movement continues to take place within the fragile context of the spread of globalized media, transnational capital investment, and development initiatives throughout the region. This introduction to global sport in the Pacific considers the complicated realities of and links between modern, highly commercialized team sports that have facilitated both the rise of global sport in the Pacific and the rise of the Pacific in global sport. Focused on key themes of agency and mobility; development and discipline; indigenization, embodiment, and ethno-nationalism; and polyvalent imaginaries, the contributions to this special issue explore how and why sporting practices have become closely linked to various economic, political, and social processes that shape possibilities for everyday life across the Pacific and beyond.

KEYWORDS: sport, mobility, globalization, commoditization, ethnography